

The Bhagavad Gita: Structure and Essence



Bhagavad Gita Collection

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Description: A comprehensive overview of the Bhagavad Gita's structure, its three major sections, and the profound teachings within

Tags: bhagavad-gita, mahabharata, krishna, arjuna, karma-yoga, bhakti-yoga, gnana-yoga, moksha, spirituality

The Bhagavad Gita is a profound philosophical work housed within the great epic, the Mahabharata, specifically within the Bhishma Parva. It is revered as one of the primary constituents of the Prasthanam Trayam and holds immense significance, prompting commentaries from Acharyas like Adi Shankara, Ramanuja, and Madhva.

Essence and Structure

The Gita is essentially the essence of the Upanishads (Upanishad Saram), referred to symbolically as the milk (Dugdham Gitamritam Mahat) drawn by Krishna (the milker) from the cow of all Upanishads, for the benefit of Arjuna (the calf).

The text is a dialogue between Arjuna (Dhananjaya/Gudakesha) and Krishna (Hrishikesh/Jagadguru).

It is composed of 700 verses (Sapta Shatam) divided into 18 chapters (Ashtadashadhyayas). The conversation begins not with Arjuna or Krishna, but with the anxious query of Dhritarashtra to his advisor, Sanjaya, on the holy battlefield of Kurukshetra (Dharmakshetra Kurukshetra).

The Three Shatkams

The 18 chapters are philosophically divided into three sets of six (Shatkams):

1. Prathama Shatkam (Chapters 1–6): Karma Yoga and Gnana

Yoga 

Chapter 1 (Vishada Yoga): Begins with Arjuna's distress and sadness (dukham). He is confused about fighting his own relatives and teachers (Bhishma, Drona). Arjuna feels non-violence (Ahimsa Paramo Dharmaha) is the superior path and refuses to fight.

Chapter 2 (Sankhya Yoga): Krishna begins his teachings by explaining the fundamental distinction between the impermanent body (Shariram) and the eternal soul (Atma).

Karma Yoga: Krishna emphasizes selfless action, citing the example of Janaka Maharaja who performed his duties without attachment. He stresses the importance of performing duty (karma) until death for the welfare of the world (Loka Sangraha), setting a good example for followers.

Avatar Rahasya (Chapter 4): Krishna explains the distinction between his birth (Avataram), which is decided by his own will (Iccha), and the birth of the individual soul (Jivatma), which is decided by its accrued actions (Karma). Krishna reveals the threefold purpose of his descent: protecting the righteous (Paritranaya sadhunam), destroying the wicked (Vinashayacha dushkritam), and establishing Dharma.

2. Madhyama Shatkam (Chapters 7–12): Bhakti Yoga

This section introduces Bhakti Yoga as the spiritual vehicle for the Jivatma to attain Moksha (release).

Bhakti Yoga is supported by the two "wheels" of Karma Yoga and Gnana Yoga.

Bhakti is understood as mature Gnana (knowledge) that ripens into love for the divine, leading to the highest state called Parama Bhakti, where the devotee feels they cannot exist without Krishna.

3. Tritiya/Charama Shatkam (Chapters 13–18): Conclusion and Resolution ✨

This final section addresses the volley of questions Arjuna had throughout the conversation. It covers concepts like the three modes of material nature (Satva, Rajo, Tamo Gunas).

The Climax (Charamas Shlokam): In the 18th chapter (verse 66), Krishna delivers the ultimate instruction: **Sarva dharman parityajya mam ekam sharanam vraja.** This is interpreted as abandoning the anxiety or worry concerning the successful completion of one's religious duties, and surrendering unconditionally to Krishna alone.

The Divine Promise: By surrendering, the devotee's entire storehouse of past bad actions (Sanchita Papa) is destroyed. Krishna promises, "Aham tva sarva papebhyo mokshaishyami ma shuchah" ("I shall release you from all sins, do not worry"). This unconditional surrender ensures Moksha.

Conclusion 🏆

The dialogue concludes with Arjuna finally convinced to fight. Sanjaya, reporting back to Dhritarashtra (who is blind and worried), assures him of the outcome. Sanjaya concludes that victory (Dhruva Niti) lies wherever Krishna (the master of Yoga Shastra) and Arjuna (the master of archery) are present.



Reference

This blog post is based on notes taken from the following video: **Video Source: Watch on YouTube** For a more detailed explanation, I highly recommend watching the original video.



Acknowledgment & Disclaimer

These articles are based on discourses by **Sri Dushyanth Sridhar**, who renders discourses in English & Tamil on Rāmāyana, Mahābhārata, Bhāgavata, Vishnu Purāna, Bhagavad Gitā, Vishnu Sahasranāma, and Divya Prabanda in the upanyāsam, pravachanam, or kālakshepam style. Visit <https://desikadaya.org>

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